

Grace Works, Part 4 - Romans 4:13-17 - October 2nd, 2011

- This is part four of a series titled; "Grace Works." In this chapter, the Apostle Paul has demonstrated this with Father Abraham and King David.
- The reason he refers to the both of them is, they share one thing in common; namely, they were both recipients of God's credited righteousness.
- It's not just that they were declared righteous, it's how they were declared righteous. Neither one of them were righteous vis-a-vis their works.

- In other words, these two men of God who would have arguably been the most important figures in all Israel's history, had nothing to do with it.
- They didn't do anything, or work for anything, that would have made them righteous before God, or pleasing to God, while under the law of God.
- Paul communicates this, and illustrates this, by telling them that Abraham's credited righteousness came before the covenant of circumcision.

- In order to better understand why Paul says this, this way we need to know that the Jews believed circumcision was synonymous with salvation.
- For Paul to say that Abraham's salvation, as it were, came not because of his circumcision but before his circumcision would've been explosive.
- In effect, Paul has single handedly, with the stroke of his pen, so-to-speak, dismantled any hope of obtaining righteousness by their own works.

- The Apostle knows he must do this first, by the Holy Spirit, because their works will not allow them to receive the message of the grace of God.
- So too is this true for me and you. God's grace, in our lives, isn't even on the table, as long as our works have been given a place at the table.
- Maybe another way of saying it is, works becomes the antithesis, even the enemy of grace, in that it strives and wars against all that grace is.

- Now that Paul has taken the works of Abraham's circumcision off the table of grace, they're ready to taste from the cup of God's amazing grace.
- We saw, in the first twelve verses, five answers to why it is that grace works, and in the interest of time, we won't take the time to review them.
- Our 6th way is in verses 13-15. Paul sort of rounds a corner by addressing legalism. If you want to kill grace, just invite legalism over for dinner.

6. When it's not brought under legalism (Verses 13-15)

(13) It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. (14) For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, (15) because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

- v13 Paul tells them that it wasn't through the law that Abraham received the promise, rather it was through the righteousness that comes by faith.
- v14 He says that if those who live by law are heirs, then faith would be of no value, and it would then render the promise worthless as a result.
- v15 He explains this in a very interesting way saying it's because the law brings wrath, and where there's no law, there will be no transgression.

- This is interesting for a number of reasons not the least of which is, if there's no such thing as the law, there's no such thing as breaking the law.
- Furthermore, where there is the law, and the breaking of the law, you will then have the wrath, or punishment, for the transgression of the law.
- Perhaps this parenting illustration will be a good demonstration of how this works. Let's say that my wife and I leave our children home alone.

- Before we leave, we lay down the law, and tell them not to open up our bedroom door while we are gone. What do you suppose they will do?
- I would suggest, because they're sinners just as your children are, they'll transgress the law, and open the door, bringing upon them my wrath.
- Now, what if I never laid down that law? They wouldn't even be tempted to open the door, thus where there is no law, there is no transgression.

- Let's take our illustration a step further, and instead of laying down the law and bringing them under legalism, we made them a promise instead.
- Before we leave, we tell our offspring, as our heirs, through the righteousness that comes by faith they'll receive the promise of lots of ice cream.
- That would change the whole complexion of it, because now, instead of being brought under the law, they are being brought into the promise.
- That's why Paul says it wasn't the through law but the righteousness that comes by faith, that Abraham and his offspring received the promise.

- What was the promise? That they would be the heirs of the world. However, for those heirs living under legalism the promise became worthless.
- As one Bible commentator so eloquently said it; "This promise given to Abraham wasn't given because of the law. It was given before the law."
- Here's the take away for all of us here today; I have no hope of enjoying the sweet taste of God's grace if I live under the bitterness of legalism.

7. When I trust God's promise is guaranteed (Verses 16-17)

(16) Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. (17) As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

- v16 Paul expounds on the promise coming by faith saying that it can be by grace and guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring as the father of all.
- v17 He says Abraham is a father of many nations believing the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.
- Paul is quoting Genesis 17:4-5, and in so doing, he gives them a solid foundation of faith upon which to build and guarantee that it is by grace.

- These two verses in Romans pack a powerful principle, and I think we would be grossly remiss were we not to fully apply its truth into our lives.
- God had already guaranteed that Abraham would be the father of many nations both physically, and spiritually, long before it actually happened.
- In God's eyes, he had already given life to the death of Sarah's barren womb, and called that which was not, as though it had already existed.

- Also, God had already given life to the death of Isaac being sacrificed by Abraham, calling into existence, that which had not already existed.
- In the sight of God, Isaac already existed, and Abraham had already been given life to the dead, calling things that are not as though they were.
- It's in the context of Abraham being justified by his faith, not his works when he offered Isaac on the altar that James writes that faith works.

James 2:17 KJV Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

- The best way I have ever heard this explained is that it's; "*faith alone that saves, but the faith that saves is not alone* - it has good works with it."
- Another said it best when they wrote how that; "What saves a man is not faith *and* works, nor is it faith *or* works. It is only faith *that* works."
- If the truth be known we don't want it any other way. If works play a part then I'm insecure with no guarantee, and I'll always be up and down.

William Newell - "Now if you introduce man's works (for man always says, "I must do my part"), you introduce an element of insecurity and uncertainty. For no man, trying to "do his part," is ever certain that he has done, or will do, his "part." Salvation is of God, not of man. It is of faith, and so, of grace; and thus, of God. For faith is unmixed with the vain promises and hopes of man to accomplish "his part"; but looks *to what God has done*, in sending His Son, to do a *finished work* on the cross; and to the fact that God has raised up Christ; and that Christ is our unfailing High Priest in heaven."